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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004085

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: FM PROVIDES SYRIA TRIP READOUT; NOTES "NEW TONE"  
FROM SARG

REF: STATE 162350

Classified By: Classified by PolMil Minister Counselor Marcie Ries for  
Reasons 1,4 (d/b)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In a December 14 meeting with PolMil Minister Counselor Ambassador Marcie Ries and Pol Counselor Matthew Tueller, Foreign Minister Zebari said he detected a "new tone" from the SARG and an increased willingness to engage on a range of issues. The Foreign Minister reported that President Assad agreed to the opening of an Iraqi consulate in Aleppo and the countries are contemplating an exchange of ambassadors. Zebari focused on foreign terrorist and facilitator (FTF) and received a brief from the Syrian Vice President for Security on the SARG's FTF efforts. Zebari cautioned that the Syrians have noticed a reverse flux of terrorists into Syria and think improved security in Iraq is only a "lull." He confirmed that the Jordanians have not yet received their share of the USD 25 million refugee pledge, but added the GOI would not object if the Government of Jordan turned it directly over to the UNHCR. Zebari confirmed that Prime Minister Maliki's office instructed him to decline the French invitation to the Paris Palestinian donors conference. END SUMMARY.

#### SYRIA TRIP

¶2. (C) Zebari, who was suffering from the flu, asked both Deputy Foreign Ministers (Libeed Abbawi and Mohammad Hammoud) to sit in on the meeting. The Foreign Minister said he had noticed a "new tone" in his "open and clear" discussions with President Assad, Prime Minister Utri, and Vice President for Security, Ahmed Nassif. His hosts assured Zebari they support the Iraqi political process, but just could not say so publicly (for reasons Zebari did not specify.) Deputy Foreign Minister Libeed Abbawi, who accompanied Zebari to Syria, admitted this was the first time he had heard Syrians use this type of language and thought it tantamount to an SARG "apology and explanation."

¶3. (C) Zebari pointed out that, unlike Iran, all his Syrian hosts assured him they wanted a secular Iraq and even broached the idea of a dual alliance between Iraq and Syria, which the Syrians hinted might ultimately include Iran. Zebari and Syrian Prime Minister Utri discussed economic relations, particularly the Kirkuk-Banyas pipeline, and agreed to revive the Iraqi/Syrian Higher Commission. Zebari reported that President Assad has agreed to an Iraqi consulate in Aleppo and added that the two countries were contemplating an exchange of ambassadors.

¶4. (C) Emphasizing this was a "political, not a night-vision goggle issue" Zebari told his hosts he welcomed recent SARG measure to combat foreign terrorists and facilitators (FTF) but thought they could do more. Vice President for Security Nassif assured Zebari the SARG was targeting Saudis, Libyans and Maghrebis and turning them around at Syrian POEs if they

did not have legitimate reasons for entering Syria. Zebari noted that despite this, the influx of FTF into Iraq continued and added the SARG are also noticing a reverse flux of FTF into Syria. He cautioned that the Syrians think improved security in Iraq is &temporary, a lull.8 He described his hosts as "worried about a long-term US/Iraqi security partnership" and gave them SPD and UNSCR renewal readouts. Zebari reported the Syrians peppered him with questions about bases and other issues.

15. (C) Zebari mentioned the SARG are &nervous8 about the upcoming Arab Summit scheduled to be held in Damascus and fear several countries (GCC countries and KSA) might be no-shows because of events surrounding presidential elections in Lebanon. These concerns aside, Zebari said the SARG think the Lebanese presidential deadlock involves Prime Minister Siniora whom the Syrians described to Zebari as &red line, unacceptable8 to them.

#### USD 25 MILLION DOLLAR REFUGEE PLEDGE

16. (C) Zebari said the USD 15 million had been delivered to the Syrian government. He said the money was in a bank in Amman, but the Jordanians think the sum is trivial in relation to the problem and disagree with the GOI over disbursement--the GOI wants to provide it directly to the host government, the GOJ wants it to go through UNHCR. After a direct question from the PolCounselor, Zebari said the GOI would not object if the GOJ were to turn the funds directly over to UNHCR.

#### PARIS CONFERENCE

17. (C) Zebari raised the issue earlier in the day with the  
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Prime Minister's Office, which instructed him to decline the invitation. Both Ambassador Ries and the PolCounselor emphasized how unfortunate this would be after Annapolis, but Zebari said he was following instructions and that the &no8 was final.

#### IRAN TRILATS

18. (C) Ambassador Ries told the Foreign Minister that we needed to reschedule the original December 18 date. Zebari noted the Iranian delegation would arrive in Baghdad on Saturday, December 15 and that they wanted to &exchange ideas8 before the meeting with the USG. Zebari confided that the Iranians true intent was to expand the scope of the talks to include CLC, Ba'athist, MEK and the PKK. Ambassador Ries and Pol Counselor emphasized these were US/Iraq bilateral issues that we would not agree to include in trilats focused on improving security in Iraq. Zebari agreed to offer the 28th as an alternate date but added the Iranians had told him that Department spokesman Sean McCormack made a statement the previous day blaming the Iranians for the delay. (NOTE: We told Zebari we would follow up; the Iranians were apparently correct. END NOTE) All agreed there should be no further public statements about dates from either the Iraqi or the US side.

#### EID MESSAGE

19. (C) At the end of the meeting, PolCounselor delivered reftel message to the Foreign Minister.  
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